

**Housing Committee Public Hearing
Feb 17, 2009
Testimony from Diane Randall,
Partnership for Strong Communities**


**Partnership for
Strong Communities**

at The Lyceum

Rep. Green, Sen. Gomes, distinguished members of the committee, my name is Diane Randall. I am director of the Partnership for Strong Communities, a statewide housing policy organization that conducts research, educates and advocates for supportive and affordable housing to serve the needs of the homeless, disabled, very low, low and moderate income residents of our state.

Rather than comment on specific bills today, I am submitting written testimony. I do want to speak about Ch. 8-30g and the important role it plays – and must continue to play – in helping us create a full range of housing options for ALL the people we need to live in Connecticut.

Housing is a mosaic: there is no single need that can be satisfied by one single program. CT has different programs and efforts because different kinds of housing are needed for different communities and differing households. We need a wide range of housing options **all over the state**.

Three years ago, the Partnership for Strong Communities helped launch HOMEConnecticut, an effort to change how towns and developers work together to create the housing we need. The General Assembly passed legislation in 2007 creating the HOMEConnecticut program, and as we speak, more than 60 towns are seeking to plan Incentive Housing Zones under the HOMEConnecticut program. Whether towns are rich or poor, Republican or Democrat, urban, suburban or rural, they are finding that they currently do not have the homes they need for police, firefighters, teachers, nurses, mechanics and host of very important people in their communities.

You have heard/will hear today from builders and developers who will testify to the demand for affordable homes in our state. Let me give you the statewide numbers:

- ¼ of the renters in CT earn less than 50% of median income and spend more than half that income on housing. There's not much left over for food, clothing, healthcare, transportation and other needs.
- ¼ of all households earn less than 80% of median income and spend more than 30% of that income on housing.
- Family homelessness rose 13% last year because those families couldn't afford the rent.
- We've lost more 25-34-year-olds since 1990 than any other state largely because we haven't built the affordable rentals, townhomes and starter homes they need.

8-30g has, and can continue, to help solve those serious problems.

1. In 20 years, it's produced 4,000 affordable homes and another 5,000 modest, market-rate homes. They are beautiful, well-designed, well-situated, and lasting.

2. They are good neighbors. They have provided homes for people their communities needed. They have NOT led to higher crime, lower property values or increased school costs.

To summarize our thoughts on most of the bills before you:

- **Bills 207, 5585, 5588, 5590, 5591, 5594** We strongly oppose any bills that would repeal 8-30g or make it unworkable. While I respect Rep. Miller's intent to increase the supply of affordable housing through a set-aside to 40%, 50% or even 100% of the units in a development would make it impossible for a builder to earn a profit and, thus, prevent the statute from working.
- **Bills 208, 5240, 5527, 5593, 5977** We strongly oppose the proposed bills that would count accessory or "in-law" apartments as affordable unless they were deed-restricted for at least 10 years. To simply count units that are currently priced at an affordable level doesn't mean they will continue to be. We have heard from numerous municipal officials that once-affordable homes or rentals in their communities are now well out of range of workers and young families. Had they been deed-restricted, they would have remained affordable.
- **Bill 206** We strongly oppose changing the point system for achieving a moratorium under the act. The point system is workable now; towns have achieved moratoria. To increase points for any group, including the elderly, would deny opportunities to other groups.
- **Bill 5525** As for exempting towns from 8-30g if they establish Incentive Housing Zones, that is likely problematic. Would a tiny zone of, say, 4 units qualify a town? If not, how large would it have to be, how many units would have to be affordable, at what level of affordability, for how long, and wouldn't it be wise to make sure the units would actually be built?!
- **Bill 207** We proudly note that, in response to at least two bills that want a system of financial incentives for towns to replace 8-30g, there is ALREADY a law that provides financial incentives. It is called HOMEConnecticut and I would be happy to talk to the co-sponsors about its provisions.
- **Bill 240,241** We strongly support, in spirit, the bills that would give veterans a preference for affordable or subsidized housing or a greater voice at CHFA. We would note that building supportive housing has helped veterans and will continue to if we fund it.
- **Bills 5552, 5586, 5595, 5596, 5597** The proposed bills that would deny provision of municipal services to developments that are affordable – or that would require impact fees or studies – are unwise and unfair. Onerous requirements of affordable housing builders would make it unprofitable and thus impossible for those developments to go forward. And they ignore the value of the housing to a community. Housing is a net plus; it doesn't increase education costs, doesn't hurt property values and, more to the point, affordable housing provides a community with workers, shoppers, volunteers and other vital residents.
- **Bills 5584, 5587** The proposals to limit an affordable development's density to the maximum density "of the municipality's largest residential density" – or to the height of existing dwellings -- would make a development financially infeasible,

especially in the many municipalities where the minimum densities are single units on 1- or 2-acre lots.

In summary, 8-30g is workable, reasonable program. Connecticut needs more housing that is affordable in order to grow our workforce; we need to insure that all programs that contribute to this goal are effective, including HOMEConnecticut and state housing finance programs. Towns that are proactive in creating housing do better than towns that wait to react to development proposals. The state needs housing, towns need housing, and the large majority of these proposals do not further those goals.